

## **TIPS FOR THE FAR AWAY PARENT**

(Compiled from Dr. Isolina Ricci and Vicki Lansky)

1. Reassure your children you will still be connected with them when they are living with their other parent.
2. Give your child immediate proof of your connection with him or her by making a phone call on the child's arrival at the new place. Perhaps have a phone installed in the child's room.
3. Contact your child's school so you know a little about his or her world.
4. Call your children (who are old enough) at least weekly.
5. Give your children stamped, self-addressed envelopes and postcards so they can write to you.
6. Send cassette or videotapes of yourself, reading bedtime stories, showing parts of your day, etc.
7. Mail pictures of you, and your life and environment.
8. Collect things that remind you of your children and put them in a "Thinking of you" box. Date the items and look at them together next time they are with you.
9. When calling on special occasions, predetermined times for phone calls are usually helpful.
10. If your budget allows, try watching a TV show or TV sports event "together" by phone for awhile, long-distance.
11. Keep a running list (like a grocery list) of things you'd like to share with your children during the week. Encourage your children to do the same.
12. Children love to receive mail, so write as often as you can. Even a postcard is enjoyed. This is not the time to preach and teach. (Parents sometimes mistakenly believe preaching and teaching proves they are good parents.)
13. Each time your children are with you be prepared for changes - new habits, likes and dislikes.
14. Let your children know you miss them, but that you have an interesting life that continues when they are not with you, so that they don't feel guilty about your loneliness.
15. Take advantage of children's activities in your community: library story hours, park programs, and day camps.
16. Videotape your activities with your children so they can watch themselves with you between the times they see you.

## **MORE TIPS FOR THE FAR AWAY PARENT**

(From Children of Divorce by M. Baris and C. Garrity & Vicki Lansky's Divorce Book for Parents)

### **Suggestions for CHILDREN FROM 0 to 2 1/2 YEARS OLD:**

Telephone calling doesn't work well at this age because children are unable to speak well. Frequent reminders that their far away parent exists and cares about the child are important to help the child hold a memory of the parent in mind. Phone calls are more possible at the later end of this stage even though children this age won't do much talking. Hearing a parent's voice is the main goal of a call.

1. Send many pictures.
2. Send cassette or videotapes of yourself:
  - a. Use the child's name frequently
  - b. Sing children's songs
  - c. Tell favorite stories
3. Send little colorful, fun amusements:
  - a. Paper cutouts
  - b. Stickers
  - c. Autumn leaves, sea shells, whatever is found in your locale, paper hats and homemade items
4. Send cards at holidays and special occasions.

### **Suggestions for CHILDREN FROM 2 1/2 YEARS – 5 YEARS OLD:**

Preschool aged children have very different abilities to talk on the phone. Yet all of them love to listen. Keep in mind that parents will carry on a one-way conversation at this age. Avoid "why" questions, because children almost always respond, "I don't know." Young children have a hard time answering open-ended questions, such as "What did you do this week?" or "How are you?" Instead, ask specific questions about details in their lives, such as "Did you go to the playground this week?"

1. Frequent phone calls with planned topics.
2. Send cassette tapes, videos or letters as often as possible:
  - a. Tell about yourself and use your children's names often.
  - b. Talk about shared experiences, such as "Remember the day we went to the zoo? You dropped your snow cone and we had to buy a new one and the monkeys were so silly."
  - c. Read stories onto cassette or video tapes.
  - d. Send pictures cut from magazines and photos. Most children also love riddles.

3. Send a drawing you have started to your child to finish. Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope so it can be returned to you. Talk about the drawing on the phone or on a taped message.
4. Children love to receive little treats in the mail:
  - a. Stickers
  - b. Baseball cards
  - c. Balloons
  - d. Small pieces of candy
  - e. Homemade items
  - f. Photographs
5. Send a magazine subscription and get one for yourself, too. Read and share the stories over the phone or on tape.

### **Suggestions for CHILDREN FROM 6 YEARS - 12 YEARS OLD:**

Many of the suggestions for preschool-aged children work for school-age children if adapted to older ages. Children always love to receive mail. Phone calls may be more conversational since children this age are more able to carry on a two-way conversation. Tapes can be sent in both directions with children making them also. Because children are now older, parents can share more interests, hobbies, and remembering experiences.

1. Plan to watch the same T.V. program and then phone to discuss it.
2. Practice reading over the phone by sending your child a reading book at his/her level and listening with your own copy in front of you.
3. Send local objects or news clippings of interest. Pick favorite topics - computers, new fashion trends, whatever your child is interested in. (Preaching is usually not well received.)
4. Send coded messages. These can be sent in postcard form after the initial code "dictionary" is sent. (Receiving a postcard each day is great fun for children who love mail.)
5. Send magic tricks - children adore these.
6. Purchase some equipment for your children's special hobbies or interests. Things like dance shoes, a football, the next karate belt, a backpack, or a lunch box with a special character. The idea is that something that is a part of your child's life was sent specifically by you.
7. Send a cute card when you don't have much to say, via post or e-mail.
8. Work up a game of chess or checkers you can play by mail, or over the internet.
9. Set up an Instant Messaging session on a specific day at a specified time.
10. E-mail regularly.

## **Suggestions for CHILDREN FROM 12 YEARS - 17 YEARS OLD.**

Teenagers can assume some responsibility for traveling to be with their far away parent. However, whether parents live together or separately, teenage years are when individual interests, school, sports and friends can seem more important than being with 2 parents. Also, part-time jobs can be important to teenagers during breaks from school.

Parents shouldn't be surprised if teenagers choose to spend school breaks working or involved in sports. A helpful hint is for parents not to take this personally. This is a normal part of teenager's healthy growth away from family and towards independence and is not a sign that parents are not important. Continue to let teens know parents are interested and love them, even if teenagers are unresponsive to efforts to have a relationship across a distance. Let teens know parents are happy to hear from them anytime and see them when they are ready. Many young adults reestablish relationships with parents once they are out of high school.

1. Frequent calling sometimes feels like prying to teens. Call from time to time and give them permission to call you whenever they like. Show them how to do this at your expense (perhaps collect or credit Card). When they call, try not to criticize or question excessively. E-mailing is a good way to communicate with teens; it is less intrusive and well-received when they can have time to review before they respond.
2. Send food. Teenagers love to eat. Send gift certificates for restaurants.
3. Be aware of their interests and send related objects or news clippings. Pick favorite topics - computers, new fashion trends, whatever your child is interested in. (Preaching is usually not well received.)
4. Most teens have some interest in knowing more about their heritage or roots. Send items or taped messages of interest about family background.
5. Share a magazine subscription on a subject of interest: skiing, racquetball, dancing, skating.
6. Arrange to purchase tickets to a local athletic event or concert and send them.
7. Set up an Instant Messaging session on a specific day at a specified time.